

NICHOLAS CLEEVER'S MONEY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE SECOND LIFE."

CONCLUDED FROM PAGE 184.



CHAPTER VIII.

"ALAN!" She advanced with both hands held out. They were thick red hands, covered with black lace mittens, rings shining on the fingers, bangles dangling from the wrist. She was a large-framed fat young woman, with a hook nose, and black eyes that bulged and peered aggressively at

the world. Sham rubies glittered in her ears; a sham gold necklace hung from her neck; sham pearl buckles fastened the nodding white plumes in her Gainsborough hat.

Doctor Parker would have smiled at this apparition had he met it unknown in a crowd, but it was dreadful to him now. It was the ghost of his shameful youth. Could anything be more shameful than his boyish fancy for this gross creature? When Louisa was in the world and coming to him, the purest whitest soul on earth!

"Alan! Don't you know me? Victoria—little Vicky, you used to call me."

"I remember you very well, Miss Walker. I have not forgotten a single friend in Perryville," Alan replied, as she seized his hand and shook it tenderly, still holding it when the shake was over, looking into his eyes.

"And you class me with all Perryville? 'Miss Walker'! It was not so you called me once!" She heaved a portentous sigh and shook orris-root perfume heavily into the air.

Alan made no answer, but hurried on. Great heavens! If Louisa should see this woman holding his hand and peering into his eyes! She turned and walked with him, keeping step. "Ah, you have gone out into the great world! You forget the woods and the fields and the poor neglected violets by the wayside!"

Alan shot an amused glance over the stout flower beside him.

"I have no time to gather violets in town or

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country, nor money to pay for them," he said, quietly.

"Money? Ah, how mercenary you city people are!" she cried, in a shrill lisping falsetto. "Now, in the country, flowers and friendship and—love are given away."

Love? Doctor Parker shuddered with disgust. That she should profane the word to him! He stopped short.

"I must bid you good-bye, Miss Walker," he said, resolutely. "I am on my way to the train."

"You mean to leave me without a word—of the past? Alan!"

"There can be no tie in the past to bind us together. We were but children when we knew each other, and we have both altered much since then. We should find no common ground on which to meet now."

The woman blenched a little, daunted by his decisive manner; but, when he turned away, she followed him, simpering and dropping her eyes coyly. "I—I have a claim on you, Doctor Parker."

"No claim! No ghost of a claim!" he cried, turning on her savagely.

"Oh, yes, I have! Very good in law. No! You may thank your stars I let you alone so long. I've been here in Philadelphia a month, waiting to see you. Now that I've found you, I'll not let you slip so easily. You can go no where! I'll call at your office and prove to you that I have a claim. Good-evening, sir."

She bowed down to the ground with a flourish, which caused two passers-by to halt and watch her curiously. They thought her mad, and Alan, as he hurried down the road, had the same thought. Could she be crazy—or drunk? The woman had no claim upon him. The letters he had written her were those of a school-boy of fourteen. Ten years had passed since they had met. What could she gain by tormenting him? No doubt she could find some young lawyer who would bring suit for breach of promise for her. She had plenty of money to pay for it, and such cases were full of amusement to the lawyers. "But, if she sued for a thousand dollars, I have not as many cents to pay her,"

he thought, grimly. "Not the less could she ruin my life, if her story comes to Louisa's ears."

He boarded the train and rode into town, his head dropped heavily on his breast, and his eyes closed. He could summon courage to fight ordinary trouble. But this intangible, ridiculous, hideous misery clutched him as the soft slimy devil-fish does the sailor before it drags him under the waves.

Miss Walker took the horse-car into town. She began a flirtation with the conductor, exchanged jokes with him, and nodded familiarly when she left the car at Rising Sun.

"Fine bouncing girl, from the country," he remarked to a passenger. "There's no harm in a dozen like her. I know her sort."

Alan did not know the genus of young women to which Victoria belonged, and hence overrated her viciousness. She was not cruel nor murderous, like the jelly-fish. She had really no definite ideas as to what she would do to him. Marriage and a suit for breach of promise floated dimly before her: either would be an adventure, and it was adventure for which she pined. Her father had left a small fortune: she did not want money. She had read thousands of cheap novels; but the only gleam of romance which had come into her own monotonous life in the bake-shop had been her flirtation with the boy who was now a learned and famous man. She meant to "work it up"—to bring some passion and excitement out of it. It was but scanty material, but she had no better.

A young man, with long hair and light staring eyes, was waiting, like herself, at the Rising Sun Station. He wore a reddish corduroy waistcoat, which at once attracted Victoria's admiration. This must surely be one of the leaders of fashion. She began a conversation with him concerning the car, and in ten minutes they were intimate friends. There was a secret congeniality of soul between Victoria and Thaddeus—for it was he—which rendered conventional forms absurd between them.

"And what has taken this Jersey lily to Germantown?" Thad inquired, after they had paced up and down a few times. "A young man, I'll warrant. Take care! Young men are all deceivers, except myself."

"Right you are—it was a young man; and there's his name," flourishing a scrap of paper before him.

Thad's face changed. He caught the paper.

"Doctor Alan Parker. St. Alban's Place. I know that fellow. But he does not live in Germantown."

"No; but the girl does, that he wants to marry. He goes out there every day; I followed him."

"The girl he wants to marry!" Thad repeated, a new comprehension dawning in his eyes. "Oh—oh! I understand! And what have you to do with it?"

"I mean to block his game."

His game? Their game? Louisa and this fellow Parker, who was old Cleever's cousin, meant to unite their forces and to cheat him out of his share of the miser's money? Nothing could be plainer. He stood twisting the paper thoughtfully a moment, and then turned to Victoria.

"So you can block his game? Well, I'll help you. But you must tell me all about it."

And, as the car came up, just then, they hurried into it, and, seated side by side, talked low and earnestly all the way into town.

CHAPTER IX.

In order to reach Nicholas Cleever, Thaddeus fell into the habit of visiting the Rantouls two or three times a week. That merry gang, who would have welcomed Mephistopheles himself to their green-goose and apple sauce, and, with their good-humor and hospitality, have made an honest good fellow out of him, were always made uncomfortable by Thaddeus. His moods and tragical habit of thought struck a false chord among these sincere simple folk. He, on his part, thoroughly despised them, and made no effort to hide his impatience and contempt. But, for Beesey's sake, he was kindly treated by them.

"The lad," said Mrs. Rantoul, "I fear, is a spendthrift, and, should he get the old man's money and scatter it, there would be a kind of poetic justice in it."

"Nonsense, my dear. There is no money to scatter," her husband said. "Nicholas Cleever is as poor as we are. As for Thaddeus, there is a wild desperate look in his eyes, to-night, which I don't like. I fear the boy has taken to drinking—or to opium."

Thaddeus had cause for his excitement: his creditors had pressed him hard, that morning, and threatened, unless they were paid, to levy on the contents of his studio and to send his pictures to auction. Now, the one strong genuine thread in the flimsy woof of Thad's nature was his belief in his own genius. Death itself was not so terrible to him as the prospect of seeing his pictures in a cheap Eighth-Street auction-room. He had come out to Media, prompted by Victoria, who was now his intimate ally, resolved to ask help from the old man.

"I'll put the matter to the test, and end it one way or the other," he told her.

When supper was over, therefore, the Rantouls were surprised to see him go boldly over to the table at which Mr. Cleever had seated himself for his usual game of solitaire, and speak to him in a prolonged vehement whisper. Mr. Cleever listened in silence, his eyes twinkling. Then he rapped on the table.

"Sit down, young man. So you're in fear of the sheriff, hey? And you come to tell me about it? Lord, I've known the whole story for months! I've watched every step you took. Now, I'll speak plain to you. I know you're watching me close, hoping for my death. Stop! Not a word. I'm no fool. I see what I see. You hope to inherit a slice of that million with which I'm credited. You never will. But your sister may. I haven't made up my mind. There are four ways in which I may leave my money: One is, to your mother and sister, in which case you'll have your pickings out of it, no doubt, though I'll bind it up as tight and fast as I can; another is, to my cousin, Alan Parker; the third is, to the Grand Army of the Republic—I always was patriotic," chuckling and shuffling the cards; "and the fourth is—a charity in which I am interested—say a home for old men. Now, one day I think I'll leave it to your mother, the next to Alan; then the Grand Army is the favorite, or the home. You see, as I can't take the money with me, I don't really care so much what becomes of it."

"Nor do I!" cried Thad, grandiloquently. "All I ask is a trifle now to keep me from ruin. As for your great wealth—"

"It is a heavy weight for a dead man to carry," grumbled Nicholas, flipping the cards impatiently. "If I could take it with me—but to go empty-handed! It's rough—rough! I don't care a curse what becomes of it when I'm gone!" He threw the cards down on the table impatiently and leaned back, scowling. Thad stood before him nervously, leaning first on one foot and then on the other. The Rantouls, seeing that something was wrong, were huddled in the other end of the room.

"What are you teetering that way for? Can't you stand on your feet like a man? By George! I've got it!" thumping the table. "The cards shall decide who shall get the money. And you shall play them!"

"What do you mean?" gasped Thaddeus.

"Just what I say." The old man's face grew pinched and sharp with excitement. "Sit down, I tell you! Here you, Tom Rantoul! Here's a game goin' to be played worth watchin'! You

can all look on. There are four claimants for my money when I die. Diamonds represent one of them, clubs another, spades the third, and hearts the fourth. Our friend, Thaddeus here, will play a game of solitaire, and the first suit which he will build up shall be the winner."

"But which—"

"Which is yourself, or your mother? Aha, Master Thaddeus, what would you give to know? I know. And I will abide by the game, I solemnly swear. Go on. Take the simplest game you know of—solitaire—what does it matter? The decision will be known the sooner!"

Thaddeus took up the cards and dealt them with a shaking hand. The Rantouls gathered behind him, whispering, frightened. There was something awful, to them, in this disposal of millions by a chance turn of a card. Nicholas Cleever bent over the table, grim and silent, watching every motion of Thad's fingers intently. Nobody doubted that he meant to abide by his promise, that the decision of the game should be final. At times, he scarcely breathed, so intense was his watch.

At first, the club suit was built up rapidly. Thad, as each card was added, looked up keenly into the old man's face, but it was impenetrable. Then he fancied that spades represented his mother, and began piling up that suit. He stopped, clenching his hands together.

"It's a damnable thing to do! I may be ruining myself for life, and I don't know it!" he almost shouted.

"And you may be ruining a fortune for life, and not know it. Go on," Mr. Cleever said, in a low sharp tone, that showed as much agitation as the young man's.

After that, the game progressed in silence. The falling of the ashes on the hearth was heard in the stillness. Three of the suits—hearts, spades, and clubs—were finished, except one card. Thaddeus held the three kings in his hand, ready to put them on. He stood up, in his excitement. The Rantouls crowded close.

"Now—now!" cried old Nicholas. "Decide, decide!"

"For God's sake, sir, give me a hint," whined Thaddeus.

"This much I will say: that your mother's fortune lies in one of those three suits. Not a syllable more."

Thad stared at them each in turn, pale and trembling. First he held out one king, then another, withdrawing them quickly. At last, he laid the king of hearts down.

"Wrong," said Nicholas, quietly. "Spades would have taken the money for you. Well, that is over. I'll say good-night, Mrs. Rantoul. I've had a very pleasant evening."

CHAPTER X.

DOCTOR ALAN PARKER stood beside his office-door, holding it open. "You must go," he said, resolutely, to the woman within.

The woman, who was Victoria Walker, crossed the floor slowly, with a smile and toes of her dimpled chin. "Certainly, I'll go! But the day will come when you will rue sending me out of this door. I will enter suit for breach of promise to-morrow; damages, thirty thousand dollars."

"If my property is worth so much, you may levy on it now." Alan glanced around at the pine table and rag carpet with a forlorn smile.

"I can take something from you that is worth more than chairs and table. Louisa Rawley is not likely to marry the man who wrote these letters, after they are read in court."

She was gone at last, and Alan dropped into a chair. She would carry out her threat far enough, at least, to make him the laughing-stock of the town. He would never cross Louisa's path again. And why should he ever have done it? She loved him, and God knew what his love for her was. But what a weak helpless fool he was! She was in debt and misery, and he had not money enough to buy her food if he married her. He had given his life to science, and this was his reward!

He glanced out of the window, and saw his rival, Potts, bowling past in his buggy. Potts was wise. Why had he not begun by hobnobbing with the grocer and the policeman's wife, instead of meddling with the gray matter of the brain, or trying to cure unknown hordes of epileptics? At this thought, he went hastily into his closet, and, taking out a microscope and some pulp in a bottle, began to pore over it, and soon, I fear, forgot everything, except that his great theory was to be put to the test to-morrow in the operation at Blockley.

In the meanwhile, Victoria hurried back to young Rawley's studio. She had been gone for several hours, and had left him in a condition of dumb despair. There was no longer any hope of relief from Nicholas Cleever; his creditors refused to advance a single meal or pair of shoes, and his pictures had been carted away to auction. Victoria had her purse stuffed with bills. But she was not the woman who would part with one of them unless to her husband.

She hurried back, however, to Thaddeus,

hoping to amuse him by an account of the torture which she had brought to bear on Alan. When she entered the studio, she stopped amazed. Thaddeus was stretched on a lounge, his guitar in hand, a velvet smoking-jacket falling open from his shapely figure, while he caroled: "Hark! hark! The lark at heaven's gate sings!"

"Hello! Queen Vic! Come in and sing psalms with me! We have met the enemy, and they are ours! I will pay every dollar I owe this day."

"Have you sold a picture?" cried Victoria, her lips parted with admiring delight.

"No, no, you little goose—" Thad scanned her face sharply, pausing in the middle of his sentence. He had known this woman but a few weeks, yet she had acquired an extraordinary power over him. She was the only person living who believed heartily in his great genius. Hence she was, in his eyes, wiser and more trustworthy than any other living being. "I have not sold a picture. Sit down, Victoria." He sat down beside her with a portfolio in his hands. "I have drawn a likeness. It brought me in a good bunch of these," filling a roll of bank-notes in her face.

"A likeness of what? I did not know you could paint portraits too."

Again he shot a quick doubtful glance at her face, then boldly opened the portfolio. "A likeness of a name—Nicholas Cleever. A crooked scrawl, eh? But I've done it pretty well."

The woman glanced at the sheet of paper covered with the same name a hundred times repeated.

"Forgery!" she exclaimed, staggering to her feet.

"That's an ugly word." He closed the book coolly. "I am only taking my share of the millions. It belongs to me—justly."

CHAPTER XI.

THADDEUS scattered happiness about him with his money. He paid every dollar of his debts that day; with feverish haste he brought back his pictures to the studio; he bought costly presents for his mother, Louisa, and also for Victoria, who refused them.

"I'm no receiver of stolen goods," she said. "No, of course, you don't like me to talk in that way. But it's the truth. You have a queer code of right and wrong, new to me. It's esthetic, I suppose. But I prefer the commandments."

Mrs. Rawley was radiant with delight. "He

will be a different man, Beesy, now that good luck has set in!" she said, the joyful tears in her eyes. "He sold a picture for two thousand dollars cash, yesterday, so that has enabled him to pay all his creditors."

Louisa listened uneasily. This was not the explanation which Thad had given her of his sudden wealth. It came, he told her, from a check which Cousin Nicholas, unsolicited, had sent to him. But it was like Thad, to make a mystery and romance of a plain fact! She did not ask him any annoying questions. Whether the money came to him as a gift or payment, it had paid his debts and lifted a terrible burden from her mind.

She had another anxiety which held her in breathless suspense. To-day the operation was to be performed at Blockley. She had a little note from Alan in the morning, promising to come out as soon as he knew the result. She sat down to her painting with flushed cheeks and wet eyes, her heart full of prayers and thankfulness. Thad, going out, stopped to leave an airy kiss on her forehead. His conscience, long asleep, was gnawing angrily—or was it only Victoria's startled cry of "forgery!" or the terror of prison, that gave him this inward pain? Whatever it might be, he tried anxiously to quiet it. Had he not paid off his debts honestly? Had he not bought Beesy a gown? Who could say he was not a good fellow—honorable and affectionate?

In the train, however, as he came into town, were two policemen, who sat at the end of the car. Thaddeus kept his eyes fixed on their backs, until it occurred to him that his watch might attract notice, when he turned and looked out of the window. There was a sickening choking in his throat; his heart seemed to have stopped beating. They rose at last and came toward him. He stood up, his chin quivering and his light round eyes distended until they had passed. After they were gone, he had a short relief, and began to hum a tune and joke with the conductor. But on Chestnut Street he passed the prison-van rattling down to Moyamensing. Thaddeus climbed the steps to his studio, trembling as though he had been struck with palsy. It was a gray drizzling day; the fire had gone out in the grate; the pictures stood about in dreary disorder; the windowpanes were grimy. This discomfort was as terrible to Thad as the terror which followed him. He sank in a heap on a lounge. His luck was down. He had always been a poor half-starved devil, and now he was to end his days in gaol because he had taken money which

was justly his own. Where was Victoria? She promised to bring some terrapin for lunch. They had delightful luncheons, cooking little messes over the fire together. Victoria's coarse strength and jollity were precisely the support needed by this poor creature, who had been born without any moral back-bone.

There was a step in the hall outside, and a knock. It was she, no doubt. He opened the door. A young fellow with a trim black mustache, whom he had met at Rantoul's, stood outside, smiling and bowing.

"Good-morning, Mr. Rawley. You don't remember me? Tartar, of the bank. We met at Mrs. Rantoul's, last week. Don't you recollect that delightful waltz?"

"Yes. You dance—you dance very well," gasped Thaddeus. His mouth was dry. "Come in. Take a seat. I'm in disorder here; my man has not cleared up, this morning."

"Oh, I'm sure it's a charming room. Never saw an artist's studio before. It's very interesting."

The youth stared eagerly around. The artist and man of fashion, Rawley, was a lion of much magnitude in his eyes.

Thaddeus could not sit down; he held by the mantel-shelf, to keep himself from falling.

"Did you wish to see me on any especial business?" he said.

"Oh, a trifle. The cashier is bothered about a check sent in yesterday. It is signed by your cousin, Nicholas Cleever, and made payable to Ezekiel Pettigrew, and endorsed by Pettigrew in your favor. The money was drawn by you at your bank in the city?"

He looked up interrogatively.

Thaddeus nodded; he could not speak.

"The cashier is worried about the signature. It is like Nicholas Cleever's—extremely like: but—Who is Ezekiel Pettigrew, Mr. Rawley? He is not known to any of the officers of the bank. When we saw that he had paid this check to you, we knew he must be dealing on the square, as you would know your uncle's signature."

"Oh, yes; I know Mr. Cleever's writing. I thought the check was all right, or I should not have taken it from Pettigrew," replied Thad, alertly, rejoicing secretly in his foresight that had erected this man of straw between him and detection.

"But who is Pettigrew? Mr. Smith asked me to get accurate information from you. There is certainly something queer about the signature."

Thaddeus was fluent enough when only a lie was required:

"Pettigrew? He's a Western man. St. Paul or Grand Rapids—which is it? Exporter of wheat, enormously rich. At least, so he led me to infer. He told me that he attended to Mr. Cleever's Western property—hence the check. He paid it to me for a picture: rather nice thing—Portia and Brutus. It is packed up and gone."

"And Mr. Pettigrew is gone also?"

"Left for Chicago on the Limited, last night."

"Then he can easily be caught. Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Rawley. You will probably be subpoenaed as a witness, if there is any trouble."

"Oh, see here!" muttered Thaddeus, faintly: "that check is all right. Did Mr. Cleever deny signing it?"

"Unfortunately, Mr. Cleever is very ill. His physician will not let him be disturbed—a stroke of paralysis. But, now that you have given us a clue, the officers of the bank will, no doubt, telegraph to Chicago, and have Mr. Pettigrew arrested."

The young man then wandered about the studio, loudly admiring the pictures, and at last took his leave.

Thaddeus heard the door shut behind him. A mad unreasoning terror seized him. In an hour, the officers would find Pettigrew to be a myth, and he would be arrested. He did not think of flight; he had not the courage for that. Nothing but the blank horror of a prison-cell was in the future. He, Thaddeus, with a shaven head, in a convict's striped dress, making shoes in the Eastern Penitentiary! He sobbed like a child, as he thought of it. Suddenly, his eyes fell on the bottle of laudanum.

Ah, there was escape! Sleep, at least. He poured out the brown fluid into a goblet and drank it to the dregs.

CHAPTER XII.

DOCTOR PARKER arrived at Mrs. Rawley's door at dusk, that evening. He was met by Louisa, who threw it open before he had time to knock.

"Well, Alan, well?" she cried, breathlessly.

He clasped her in his arms, and kissed her rapturously.

"Victory, Beesy, victory!" he shouted, in a way very unbecoming the learned physiologist who had just won the respect of the whole medical world. "The operation justified my theory entirely. Oh, Beesy, I have dreamed and worked for this for so many years! Why, what are you crying about, child?"

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"Nothing. I am so happy. Come in to supper; you must be faint with hunger. I know you have forgotten to eat since morning."

"That is true. How could I stop to eat? One more kiss, my darling."

When they were decorously seated at the table, Louisa said: "We are quite alone. Mother was summoned by telegraph to Cousin Nicholas Cleever. He is dying at Mr. Rantoul's. They will care for him tenderly."

"Poor old man! Is Thaddeus with him?"

"No. A man named Tartar has been here twice this evening for him. He says the studio is locked, and no one apparently within. But now tell me all about the patients, Alan."

When the story had been told and discussed in every possible point of view, Louisa said: "Oh, by the way, I saw an old friend of yours this morning."

"Of mine?"

"Yes—a woman. Victoria Walker."

He sprang up as though death had suddenly faced him.

"You have seen her? And she told you—"

"Everything she had to tell."

Louisa probably knew all that her lover suffered in the silence that followed, and for one minute she allowed him to suffer it. So much he deserved for his unfaithfulness to her when he was fourteen years old. Then she said, with a laugh:

"That boy who was in love with Miss Walker had a peculiar taste. Quite unlike yours, Alan."

He tried to speak, but kissed her instead. It is probable the subject never would have been broached between them again, but for the incidents which followed that night.

An hour later, Prudy, being summoned to the door by a ring, found a messenger-boy with a letter. It was addressed to Miss Rawley, and ran as follows:

"I did not tell you to-day, in our conversation about a mutual friend of ours, that we have another tie. I have been acquainted for some time with your brother. We found each other congenial—in short, we loved each other. He has been in sore trouble, no matter what. If you had exerted yourself to keep him from want, he never would have fallen into this trouble. He did fall into it, and, to escape, took laudanum to-day. On going to the studio, I found him pretty well on the way to kingdom come. Fortunately, he had taken too much, and was sick. Besides, I knew how to work against it. So he pulled through. He was in a desperate strait, as to body, money matters, and—other dangers. We decided that the best thing to be

done was to be married, and to leave Philadelphia. I am now his wife. We go in an hour—no matter where—to Brazil, France, Oregon.

You will not have our address. I am rich, thank God, and Thaddy shall want for nothing. Your affectionate sister,

VICTORIA RAWLEY.

"If you choose to wear my cast-off shoes, you are welcome to them."

Scarcely had they finished reading this epistle, when the postman left another. It was a brief note from Mrs. Rawley.

"Dearest Beesy: The poor dear old man is at rest. I am sure he is in heaven, for he really was well-meaning. He would take no medicine, but knocked the spoon out of my hand, and kicked every time. It would break your heart. Under his pillow, he had a paper which he kept hunting for all the time. It turned out to be his will. He left all he had to the dear Rantouls, and goodness knows they deserve it, for they are the kindest souls! The poor dear old man is to be buried on Wednesday. Come to-morrow, and bring my best crape veil. You and Thaddeus must wear mourning. Tell Alan to have crape put on his hat. You can do it for him. Use black pins. Your loving mother,

E. C. RAWLEY.

"It wasn't millions after all, only about six thousand a year. As we or Alan did not have it, I'm glad the Rantouls did. They will go to California and start a fruit-ranche.

E. C. R."

As Alan rose to go, and had said good-night for the twentieth time, still another messenger-boy attacked the door.

This time, the letter was for Doctor Parker. He read it in silence, and then, with a pale face, turned to Louisa.

"It is from one of the New York surgeons who was here to-day. The position of professor of Physiology is vacant in the medical school of which he is trustee, and he writes to offer it to me—"

Then he did a thing which would have surprised the venerable New York physician no little. Catching Beesy in his arms, he waltzed wildly around the hall with her—when he stopped for want of breath, crying: "We will all go. Mother and Prudy and all! I can buy you bread now! Bread with butter!"

The officers of the bank could not find Mr. Pettigrew; they could not find Mr. Rawley. Nicholas Clever was dead. So the matter was dropped for want of proof.

Doctor Alan Parker is now one of the foremost specialists on cerebral diseases in this country. He and his wife, with Mrs. Rawley, live in a quiet home on the Hudson. They receive ecstatic letters occasionally from the Rantouls in Southern California. From Thaddeus, they hear nothing. There is a Monsieur De Railé who has a magnificent estate near Los Angeles, and who has made a fabulous fortune by the recent boom in real estate. One of the Rantoul girls met him at a ball, and declared that it was Thad. But his wife, an imperious woman, in purple velvet and diamonds, swept him away. So the matter is still uncertain.

MY BOY STILL.

Do you think I've forgotten the day
I carried him at my breast?
Many fair children I've loved since then;
But I think that I loved him best—
For he was our first-born child, John—
And I have not the heart or will
To love him less: whatever may come,
He's my boy still!

I remember, when he was a little lad,
How he used to climb on my knee;
How proud we were of his beauty,
Of his wit and his mimicry;
And I know quite well he's a man now,
With a wild and stubborn will:
But, whatever he is to you, John,
He's my boy still!

He was just like sunshine about the house,
In the days of his happy youth—
You know we said that, with all his faults,
He had courage and love and truth;

And, though he has wandered far away,
I'd rather you'd say no ill—
He is sure to come back to his mother:
He's my boy still!

I know there was never a kinder heart,
And I can remember to-day
How often he went with me apart
And knelt at my knee to pray.
And the man will do as the boy did—
Sooner or later, he will—
The Bible is warrant for that: so
He's my boy still!

A mother can feel where she can't see,
She is wiser than any sage;
My boy was trained in the good old way,
I shall certainly get my wage:
And, though he has wandered far away
And followed his wayward will,
I know, whatever, wherever, he is,
He's my boy still!

CLOSE BY SAN MARCO.

BY FRANK LEE BENEDICT.



VENICE lay drowsily basking in the gorgeous sunlight of an afternoon early in June.

In the great square of San Marco, the cathedral and the doge's palace began to cast long shadows across the pavement, in which groups of the world-renowned pigeons gossiped and coquettled near knots of the equally famous beggars, who lay stretched out at full length, too lazy even to talk.

The Moors in the clock-tower beat four strokes to tell the hour, and, at the last sound, the pigeons rose up in a body and flew away in a hurry suggestive of an important engagement; but the beggars only turned over on the other side and began to doze again.

Priests, veiled women, men of all ages and conditions, and of all nations nearly, crossed and recrossed the square, and, presently, Peppino Romaldi, the very handsomest young gondolier in Venice, passed along in his turn.

He made his way into one of the narrow streets which stretch from the square like so many not over-clean ribbons blown crookedly out by a high wind. Presently, he reached a place where the "calle" met two other streets still narrower, the three forming a tiny triangle. In the middle, stood a pedestal, surmounted by a medieval conception of the devil, in rusty bronze, with menacing horns, long claws, a forked tail, and wings like a bat. In the opposite wall was a shrine containing an image

of Saint Mark, the city's patron. A lamp burned before the niche, from behind which the saint frowned at his Satanic majesty, who leered impudently in return, with his bifurcated tongue thrust out as far as possible. The base of the triangle was filled by a flower-booth, and in it, surrounded by odorous blossoms, stood the proprietress, Zinetta Garolo.

Even in Venice, the flower-girls are usually ugly; but Zinetta was a beauty. She had scores of admirers, among whom handsome Peppino was the most favored and worst persecuted, holding a firmer place down at the bottom of her rebellious young heart than he ventured to hope or she fully realized.

Zinetta was something of an heiress, too, as well as a beauty: her father had left her a house and several gondolas, which latter she had disposed of so well that their price had established her in business. She owned her stall, bought her flowers at wholesale, and had a keen eye for a bargain, impulsive and uncalculating as she was in other matters.

When Peppino caught sight of Zinetta, she was standing with her face half averted, talking to an old woman, who looked as sly and wicked as the demon on the pedestal. Perceiving Zinetta's companion, Peppino stopped short and frowned as darkly as San Marco in his niche.

After a few instants' hesitation, he strode on; but, before he reached the stall, the visitor had passed down the nearest street, and Zinetta was leaning against the side of the booth, apparently so absorbed in the contemplation of a flower she held that she was entirely unconscious of the young man's approach.

She looked bewitching in her quaint costume, the short skirts showing the pretty feet, the well-assorted colors bringing out her beauty to great advantage.

Arrived within speaking-distance, Peppino exclaimed abruptly:

"Oh, you need not pretend, Mistress Zinetta: you saw me well enough."

"Santa Maria—how you frightened me!" cried the girl. "Pretty manners indeed, Master Peppino!"

"It was that horrid old cousin of Cecco Fantoli," grumbled Peppino. "Enough to make a man forget his manners! And you promised

you would have nothing to do with him or anybody belonging to him!"

"Blessed Peter and Paul!" cried Zinetta. "If I am to turn away customers to please my friends, I may as well shut up my booth!"

"Customer indeed!"

"And a good order too, let me tell you! A rich American lady has taken an apartment in the house where Tonia helps the porters. And didn't she ask Tonia to recommend a person to send her, every day, bouquets as big as cart-wheels, of the costliest flowers? And didn't Tonia recommend me? And isn't it good of her to put a regular little fortune in my way? And who are you, to order me to turn my back on earning honest money?"

Zinetta poured out this volley with such rapidity, that Peppino had no chance to interrupt; but, as she paused to breathe, he said in a tone that showed his anger was by no means appeased:

"And she took the opportunity, I'll be bound, to talk about that red-headed fiend of a Cecco—"

"She had to, when I asked especially for him," broke in Zinetta. "And why should I not, pray? And as for red hair—my own is near enough that color to make me like it."

"You've the handsomest hair in Venice—and you know it!" shouted Peppino, gesticulating with hands, feet, and elbows till it seemed as if he would shake himself to bits. "You only say that to infuriate me!"

"You infuriate yourself, it seems to me. Oh, but you've a hot temper—milk doesn't boil up quicker—and all for nothing."

"For a good deal, I say! When I know that villain has been after you ever since his wife died! When you promised me that you—"

"You've said that already, and it wasn't true; repeating a thing doesn't make it any truer," cried Zinetta.

Peppino groaned aloud and flung up his hands.

"Well, if I did let you tease me into some sort of nonsense—not a promise, though—" pursued Zinetta, "I was a fool for my pains, since you come here to accuse me of lies and drive away a rich American customer. And I won't endure it, and so I tell you. And why should I? Am I my own mistress, or not? Did I ever engage myself to you? Do I care about you? Well, I shall not long, if you make life a burden by your persecutions."

The reason she gave for Tonia's visit was true enough, so far as it went; but, as Peppino suspected, the old woman had taken the opportunity to speak a few good words for her

kinsman. Cecco Fantoli had several times been the cause of misunderstandings between Zinetta and her youthful admirer. After one of these hot quarrels Zinetta had more than half admitted that there was hope for Peppino, and had agreed to have nothing more to do with Cecco, who was given to drink.

"He is an assassin, a drunkard, and a gambler," vowed Peppino. Then, goaded into fresh passion by Zinetta's sneers, he unwisely added: "It is a disgrace for any girl who wishes to keep respectable to be seen with him."

"I'll dance with him to-night, at the Toldi ball!" cried Zinetta, quite beside herself. "Not respectable! I— Oh, Peter, Paul, and Saint Mark! You dare to say it! Go your way! Don't speak—I've done with you!"

Then she shrieked like a maniac till a little girl whom she employed came hurrying up. The small maid was left in charge of the booth, and away sped Zinetta, followed by her lover; but not a word would she answer in return to his entreaties and expostulations. When she reached her own house, she slammed the door in his face, and he, having work to do which could not be put off, had to go his way, nearly frantic between anger and a strong sense of injury.

So the young pair had managed to make each other exceedingly wretched and get up a fierce quarrel out of very slight materials, as youthful lovers of every degree and country are much given to doing on the slightest pretext, never reflecting that the results thereof will not lie within the compass of their own wills, but must prove trifling or momentous, as fate shall decree.

In this instance, fate was not inclined to be lenient, and selected some very black threads with which to weave the unlucky episode of that sunny afternoon into the devious meshes of her crooked web.

Cecco Fantoli was not at the dance, that night; but, though her special design for punishment failed, Zinetta contrived to torture Peppino by her coquettices with sundry new admirers, until, after trying to quarrel with them, he followed the old-fashioned plan of flirting in his turn. He selected Zinetta's chief enemy for the display of his talent, and found the young woman quite ready to meet him half-way.

The next morning, poor Peppino was wretched enough to try the effect of prayers and penitence, and foolishly wasted time which he could not afford to lose in order to meet Zinetta in her rounds among the houses where she regularly left flowers.

Just before she saw him, Zinetta had felt sufficiently miserable to be almost ready to take

some step toward reconciliation; but the sight of her rueful-faced lover roused a desire to show her power and have satisfaction for her own pain: he got unmercifully snubbed, and the breach was made wider than ever.

Then, of course, the rival threw herself in the young man's path, and old Tonia gossiped, and friends interfered, and, by the end of three or four days, the young couple were desperate.

Then came a grand festa; Cecco Fantoli was several times Zinetta's partner in the dance, and, before night, had an altercation with Peppino. The pair were quickly separated, and no harm came of the encounter, only it was remembered afterward, as was the fact that Peppino had been the aggressor.

Only a few days later, old Tonia stopped by Zinetta's stall, as she was passing the corner of the street.

"Blessed San Marco, but I am tired!" she exclaimed, by way of salutation. "The people at our house have all been wanting commissions done at the same time, and all in forty different directions. And the American signora wants white flowers for to-night—all white. Don't forget! They are to be at the house by eight o'clock."

"So they shall," returned Zinetta, without looking up from her odorous task of bouquet-making.

Tonia gave a long sniff, expressive of dissatisfaction: probably she thought the flower-girl's manner wanting in cordiality, for she proceeded to administer a little reminder of her own kindness.

"I flatter myself I found you a good customer in the American," said she, "and you will do me the justice to own it's not the first one I've brought you—and, please the saints, it shan't be the last. Go, go—when Tonia Daschi is a friend, she's so in earnest."

"I never denied it," Zinetta replied, looking up with a sudden flash in her eyes; "and nobody can say it's losing time to recommend me. There are silver pieces to be made by it; don't forget to say so, if you hear any ill-natured person doubt it."

Zinetta's tongue was too keen a weapon lightly to encounter, and, besides, Tonia had numerous reasons for not wishing to offend the girl. She perceived that she had let a moment's irritation carry her too far, and hastened to atone.

"Don't I say it in square and church and on the bridges?" she cried. "You're the noblest girl in the world, Zinetta—and nobody knows it better, or says it oftener, or is prouder of your friendship than L."

"Acquaintance is one kind of bush, and friendship is another," quoth Zinetta; "I've acquaintances enough—"

"Yes, indeed! You speak like a book!" cried Tonia, ignoring the slight. "As you say, it's not easy to have real friends. And that reminds me: Who do you think has gone to Padua?"

"Your news is as stale as old Mother Brigitta's roses," said Zinetta. "As if I hadn't heard, three days ago, that Maria Ravelli had gone to see her aunt; and an ugly pair of noses met, too."

"Yes, yes," tittered Tonia. "But, last night, who should go but Master Peppino, as large as life? And they were saying, in the baker's, that the aunt means to make a match between them."

"Do I care?" broke in Zinetta, with such violence that the old woman retreated a step. "Let them marry! He knows I will never have him, and everybody else knows it's not for lack of coaxing."

"No, no!" cried Tonia, wrinkling her face worse than ever and striking her hands hard together. "The whole city knows that!"

Zinetta picked up her bouquets, summoned her handmaid, and prepared to depart with scant ceremony. Tonia coolly asked where she was going, and, having been told, declared that one of her multifarious errands required her to take the same direction. The information was received in silence; but, in no way disturbed thereby, Tonia trotted off at the girl's side, looking as unfit a companion for the delicate lovely creature as a short-legged pug-dog would look for a gazelle.

"Blessed Madonna, but the weather grows warm!" panted the old woman. "It is bringing the strangers early, though—which is a blessing. That cross-eyed daughter of the old tailor was over at the Lido, yesterday, and she said there were people enough to make you think it must be the middle of July."

"The laziness of that scissors-and-yardstick girl is a disgrace!" cried Zinetta, by way of a little vent for her nervous excitement and trouble.

"It is! it is!" Tonia averred, then added: "It is you, my Netta, who will be coining money over at the shore, before long—indeed, you might now."

"I am going, later in the day; I made up my mind yesterday that it was time to take my flowers over," Zinetta answered.

She had not thought of it—the idea was just born out of her restlessness, and Tonia knew it;

but, far from hinting this, she loudly applauded her companion's industry and business-talent.

"You could not wait till to-morrow?" she asked.

"No: I shall not have time then. I shall go by the five-o'clock boat; I must stop at Tito's and see about a new basket."

Tonia saw the purchase made and heard Tito's boy engaged to take it to the steamboat; then she went her way content, having accomplished exactly what she had promised Cecco Fantoli to try and bring about.

The tiny steamboat set out on its half-hour's voyage as near the appointed time as anything Venetian, animate or inanimate, can ever be expected to do, and Zinetta was among its passengers. The Lido is a long strip of sand which forms a natural bulwark between the Adriatic and the islands on which the city is built, and is well provided with restaurants and bathing-houses, and, during the summer season, is thronged day and night.

Pretty Zinetta was one of the sights of Venice, and could have sold twice as many flowers, had her big baskets been able to hold them. She laughed and talked with friends and strangers, but her saucy speeches were an effort, and what had always been a pastime proved such hard work that she felt heartily glad when the last bouquets were disposed of, and she free to depart; she was far too good a business-woman to go before, in spite of weariness or heartache. Harder to bear than even these pangs, was the jealous rage which Tonia's gossip in regard to Peppino and her rival had roused, and several persons whom she met had added fuel to the flame by showing themselves aware of the young man's having followed Maria to Padua, and indulging in jests or more insupportable words of sympathy.

So, when crafty Cecco Fantoli approached her with a fine show of meekness and civility, Zinetta was near enough insane with pain and jealousy to be ready for any wild freak, which, at another time, she would no more have committed than she would have promised to marry the big, stalwart, dangerous-looking man.

A strain of Austrian blood on his mother's side was very apparent in Cecco, and had helped to make him unpopular from boyhood. But he had pleasant manners, and would have been handsome, but for the evil expression in his blue eyes and the marks of dissipation in his face.

"I wish you would take a row in my new boat, Zinetta," he said; "she is a beauty, and it will be lovely on the water—But you wouldn't go

with me—though I know two or three of your friends are here that would join us—but, I suppose, Peppino—and there's his cousin Giulia yonder, to repeat—"

"I'll go, with pleasure," Zinetta interrupted; "I don't want anybody else—it would only make the rowing hard work. Tonia told me about your handsome boat—yes, I'll go."

When sunset came on, they were out seaward, and a curve in the shore completely hid the cafés and bathing-houses. Cecco had let her be silent when she wished—he had sung in his rich baritone voice, he had told her amusing stories, and managed artfully to make her forget how time was passing, or how far they had gone. When she did rouse up to the fact, he said:

"Just round this other curve—from there you can see the brig I was talking about."

"Since it will only take a few moments," she said, indifferently.

Cecco rowed on, and presently called:

"There she lies—doesn't she dance like a fairy?"

The man's breath was coming quick and fast—his blue eyes burned like flame—the force he had put on himself for this long hour had only added to his internal excitement. He had been drinking deeply for several days and nights, and his love for Zinetta was the maddest passion he had ever known.

She was not noticing him. She sat with her head turned toward the vessel, her hand shielding her eyes so that she could look more closely at it. Suddenly, she felt the boat rock with such violence that she uttered a little cry of fright—then Cecco was half kneeling by her side, and gazing into her face with his burning eyes.

"I love you, Zinetta!" he fairly gasped. "I love you—oh, you know it—I have told you!"

"And I have answered—always the same no," she exclaimed, growing angry at having been startled. "You promised never again to talk like this—it is very rude and mean to do it after my coming out in your boat!"

Zinetta was so accustomed to ruling her adorers, that even now it did not occur to her to be afraid of Cecco, and she flashed her black eyes at him with audacious scorn.

"I can't keep silence!" he cried. "You just drive me mad—you play with me—you torture me! Oh, if you think you can make me a cat's-paw, so that you can revenge yourself on that deceitful fickle Peppino, you are mistaken!"

"Take up your oars this instant, Cecco Fantoli, and row me to shore!" cried Zinetta, pushing him away. "I was a fool to trust you—"

"No, Zinetta, no!" he cried, still kneeling before her. "I love you so—no man ever can love you half so dearly—I would sell my soul for you!"

"I can live without depriving you of that valuable possession!" she laughed, beginning inwardly to quake, but bravely keeping up her air of assurance. "Row to shore—that's the only favor you can do me just now!"

"So you still care for that miserable traitor—I thought you had more pride!" Cecco sneered.

"Look you, Fantoli!" cried Zinetta. "If Peppino were as bad as you want to make him out, he would still be worth twenty like you! Row me to shore, I say—if you don't, I'll jump out and swim!"

In an instant, he caught her in his arms, though she fought like a young tigress, and shrieked at the top of her voice.

"Promise to marry me, or we both go overboard!" he cried. "I can't live without you—at least, you shall die with me!"

The two struggled; the boat drifted on; Zinetta wild and blind with desperation, and Cecco crazed between drink and fierce passion. Once more, Zinetta's voice rang out in a shrill scream, as Cecco dragged her forward, exclaiming:

"Promise, or over we go! Only say yes—I love you so—I love you!"

There was a quick blow against the stern from another boat, which had rounded the curve unnoticed by either. With one terrible malediction, Peppino sprang at Fantoli, who was forced to release his hold of the girl.

The two men fought in the bottom of the boat like demons—a sudden lurch of their bodies caused the craft to capsize. Peppino saw Zinetta fall into the water.

The gondolier dealt Cecco another blow, shook him off, and swam to Zinetta's side just as she was sinking. Supporting the unconscious girl with one arm, and swimming with the other, he managed to reach his boat. He got his insensible burden into it, and rowed toward the shore—too busy watching her to remember his enemy. As they neared the beach, he had a quick glance of a man swimming round the curve, whom he knew must be Cecco.

As he ran his boat on the sand, Zinetta recovered consciousness, and was soon able to sit up and answer his eager inquiries.

"And you saved me, Peppino," she cried, beginning to sob. "Oh, I thought you were in Padua!"

"Yes, I know," he answered; "I heard that lie—how could you believe it? Oh, my girl,

don't you see that old Tonia has been working for Cecco—trying to separate us? Padua—I! Don't think I was following you—I couldn't work, so to-day I came over to the Lido—I hired Scaldi's boat to go fishing—I was just coming round the point when I heard you scream—oh, Zinetta!"

"And you knew my voice?" she sobbed.

"Of course, I knew it!" he answered. "Oh. I lived a hundred years in those minutes—Zinetta, Zinetta!"

He sat down on a bit of timber and covered his face with his hands, shaking from head to foot. Suddenly he felt Zinetta's lips on his fingers. She drew away the hands from before his eyes, and, kneeling by his side, looked at him with a beseeching glance.

"You might forgive me," she whispered, "if—if you love me still; but—but—"

Then she was clasped in his strong arms, and, before either remembered this mortal world again, the full moon had risen out of the waters, a broad disk of gold, in whose light the sails of the brig glittered and waved, as she courtesied gracefully to the Adriatic, and set forth on her shining path.

"And at last we are to be happy," were Peppino's words of farewell, that evening, as he prepared to leave Zinetta's house.

"At last," she echoed, and he folded her once more to his heart. "But it is thanks to your patience and bravery—I shall never forget that—never."

So they parted, each to pass a night of such sweet peace and blessed repose as neither was to know again for many terrible weeks.

The pair had been seen by numerous acquaintances before they left the Lido, having gone to one of the cafés, where they dried their garments, and Peppino gave as concise a statement of what had happened as the curiosity of his questioners would permit.

The next day dawned bright and beautiful. Zinetta was early at her stall—that is, early as morning hours go in Venice, where everybody is late. Peppino had promised to look in on her about nine o'clock, but he did not come.

As the moments passed, Zinetta did not grow vexed at this lack of punctuality, as she would have done a week before; she told herself that he had some good reason, and made up a dainty little bouquet to pin in his buttonhole.

Ten o'clock pealed out from the bell-tower in San Marco's Square, and, before the musical tones had fairly died away, Zinetta was startled by the hasty approach of several of her girl friends, all crying out at once news so impossible

in its horror that at first her brain refused to odd thing—we might as well be under Austrian grasp its import.

"Peppino choked Cecco to death in the water! Oh, nobody blames you, Zinetta—you had fainted—but he murdered Cecco—he has been arrested."

These sentences contain the gist of the broken exclamations and cross-fire of assertions and negations which sounded like the roar of thunder in Zinetta's ears.

"It is a lie!" she cried, wildly. "Let me go—where have they taken him? I can testify—I—"

"Oh, the officers are coming for you!" interrupted several voices. "There is to be the opening examination at noon! Tonia gave the alarm—she found somebody who saw the fight!"

With one wild cry, Zinetta sank on the ground, and for awhile a blessed insensibility shut out her woe.

The story was only too true, and, before night, Peppino was shut up in prison on the charge of having murdered Cecco Fantoli. The fisherman's boat had been found drifting bottom-upward not far from the shore, but no trace of the man himself could be discovered.

The enmity between Peppino and his presumed victim had long been notorious; their altercation a few days previous, which had so narrowly escaped some fatal result, was, of course, brought up in the evidence. Zinetta's testimony was only an additional proof against her lover, for the last she had seen of the two men, before losing consciousness, they were struggling in the water, Peppino uppermost.

There was no hope of finding the body, for it would have floated away with the tide; but there was evidence enough to show that, if Peppino had not killed his enemy outright, he had left him to drown while insensible from his hurts.

The accused was urged to make a full confession—friends and lawyers alike assured him that his sentence would be lighter, if he would avow that, in his frenzy, he had strangled Zinetta's assailant; but this he refused to do.

"I saw him swim round the curve," he persisted. "I did not kill Cecco Fantoli; but I would if I could! He would have drowned Zinetta, if I had not saved her—he was mad with drink! That is all the truth!"

But, if he confessed, his advisers urged, he would escape with ten, or maybe only five, years' punishment; otherwise, his sentence would be the galleys for life.

"I can only tell what happened; if I must suffer for speaking the truth, then justice is an

odd thing—we might as well be under Austrian rule still," was Peppino's invariable response.

But, before the time set for his trial, the luckless young fellow lay very ill in the prison hospital. He had struck his head a severe blow against the edge of the boat, as he and Cecco fell into the water, and, between that neglected hurt and his despair, he was seized with a violent fever, which left him at death's door for weeks.

Three entire months had passed since the day of Peppino's arrest, and, though he had begun to mend, he was still so feeble that his trial had to be again postponed.

It was just at this time that an American artist, Edgar Pierson, returned to spend a portion of the autumn in his beloved Venice. He had been there two years in succession, and had always employed Peppino as his gondolier. He admired the young fellow's honesty and industry, and was well acquainted with his love for the beautiful flower-girl.

Pierson had made numerous sketches of the young couple, singly and together; and a full-length portrait of Zinetta, standing in her flower-booth, had, that spring, been exhibited at the Paris Salon, and later in New York, and had added new lustre to his rising fame.

He had just returned, after a visit to America, and had come straight from Paris down to Venice, having telegraphed to secure his favorite suite of rooms in the old palace which had been his abiding-place during his former visits.

It was late at night when he arrived, and, as he went downstairs the next morning for an early stroll, one of the first persons he met was Tonia, who had just entered, laden with packages for some of the lodgers who employed her to do commissions.

Pierson never forgot a face; he remembered the old woman at a glance, and was greeted with such exaggerated expressions of delight, that every lounging in the court knew the foreigner must be lavish with his money.

"You are just the person I want, Tonia," he said, slipping some coins into her hand. "I have a new servant who doesn't know his way about Venice. First, I want you to tell Zinetta she must fill my rooms every day with flowers, and you must go to Peppino—"

"Oh, the murderer—the assassin—that killed my precious cousin! And the signore did not know!" howled Tonia.

She poured out the whole story with ear-splitting cries and such maddening repetition, that, just to get rid of her, Pierson sent her to summon a gondola, while he hurried in to

find the proprietor of the house and gather a more connected account of the tragedy.

When he came out to the front steps again, the gondola was already there; but Pierson had changed his mind, and ordered the boatman to go in search of Zinetta: she was to come back in the *barca* and bring all the flowers she could spare. He wanted to hear the girl's version before he applied for permission to visit Peppino, which he meant to do that very day, being about as warm-hearted and impulsive a young man as could easily be found in this age of realism and disillusion.

It was a terribly changed Zinetta who appeared before him, half an hour later; he could scarcely believe the pale emaciated creature was the blooming beauty whose portrait had been the admiration of all the picture-lovers in two great cities so short a time back.

She told him the story more quietly and collectedly than anybody had yet done, and no personal grief had ever caused Pierson's heart so sharp a pang as did the agony of those despairing eyes.

"And it was my fault—all mine!" she said, drearily; for she had shed no tears. "If I could bear the suffering; but it must all come on him—for I shall die. I'm a poor weak thing; I've done all the harm I can; and I shall die very soon, and he will live and live—a galley-slave. Oh, I think God never punished a human being as he has me!"

Pierson was glad that, at this moment, his servant entered with a telegram which required an answer. He sat down at a table to write, and Zinetta, taking up her basket, passed into the next salon, to arrange her flowers in the vases.

Some moments passed; Pierson had sent his man away with the dispatch, and was wondering if any means of help for Peppino would be possible, when he was startled by a cry from Zinetta.

He ran into the next room, and found her kneeling on the floor, her eyes fastened on an open sketch-book that lay on the table.

"What is it, Zinetta? Are you ill?" he cried, in alarm.

She rose slowly and turned her white face and pathetic eyes toward him, still keeping her hand on the volume.

"I beg your pardon, Signor Pierson," she said. "It was silly of me to cry out like that; it was only seeing his picture."

"Whose picture?" asked Pierson, moving toward her. "There can't be any face you recognize in that book."

"Oh, yes—Cecco Fantoli!" she replied. "You said you did not remember him! You had forgotten—since here is his portrait. But maybe you did not know his name."

Pierson was beside her, bending over the page on which was an almost life-size head in water-colors—a strong crafty face, with fiery eyes and a curling red beard.

"Who do you say that is?" demanded the artist.

"Cecco Fantoli, of course!" she replied. "Did you paint it last autumn? Maybe before, since you had forgotten. But no: it is Cecco, just as he looked three months ago."

She dropped in a heap on the floor and began to sob piteously, though not a tear bedewed her eyes.

"Stop, Zinetta—don't!" pleaded the artist. "Stand up! Listen: I made that sketch less than a fortnight since—in New York!"

"Oh, the Virgin be praised! I knew he was alive—I knew it!" cried Zinetta. "But he will not come back—he will let Peppino go to the galleys. Help him! only help us! Dear sir, you are so good—you can do anything! Only help us!"

And then poor Zinetta sank forward, and lay still and white among the fragrant blossoms which had fallen from the table.

Space is so nearly annihilated in our age, that, of course, before the sun set that evening in New York, the police had found Cecco Fantoli and established his identity by means of the chalk drawing that Pierson had left in his studio—the sketch from which he made the water-color picture he had brought with him.

Master Cecco had feared that he might suffer disagreeable consequences if he remained in his native city, and speedily decided on a plan of escape. He got back to his house, took his small sum of ready money, a bundle of clothing, and started by that night's train to Naples. An Italian steamer was about to leave for New York, and, as extra hands chanced to be needed, Fantoli was able to work his passage to that port. He proposed to remain in the New World, at least till time should have softened the wrath of Zinetta and Peppino.

When he found that a full confession would obviate the necessity of his being carried home, he made it with a good grace in the presence of the Italian Consul, by whom it was duly forwarded to Italy.

So, when the inevitable delays were ended, Peppino once more came forth into the sunlight a free man, and heaven seemed to open before him and his penitent Zinetta.